

It is pleasing to see a return of French language scholarship in a zone that has in recent decades been dominated by American scholarship especially. The essays do not tightly mesh as there is much overlap but, taken together, offer a fairly state-of-the-art summation of what is going on in the highlands of south central Vietnam.

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A product of a French Foreign Ministry-sponsored research center in India, Renaud Egreteau's *Wooing the Generals* offers an optic on a little studied relationship, namely India's new links with the junta in Burma. While historical links between India and Burma reach back to antiquity reinforced by Burma's inclusion in British India, relations between India and Burma, especially since 1962 have been frosty. India is so absorbed with its western neighbors that Burma hardly figures on the radar screen. But an idealist streak in Indian foreign policy that abhorred the military junta across the Bay of Bengal came to be challenged some ten years back by a combination of changing geopolitical and economic interests. Notably, Burma began to fit into India's new "Look East" policy of liberalizing its markets in part in emulation of the Southeast Asian growth economies. But another calculus loomed, namely China's bold step towards the Indian Ocean through enhanced diplomatic and trade relations with the junta in Rangoon. As Egreteau develops through this book, realpolitik has replaced idealism in India's approach towards the Burmese generals.

The book is divided into four parts. The first, discusses the historic and geostrategic background. A second discusses the "stakes involved." A third discusses the "tools of Indian diplomacy." A fourth section evaluates "Indian fantasies and Chinese Realpolitik" returning in a conclusion to the question of the Burmese military's own mastery of the situation.

Correctly, the author traces Burma's non-alignment policy which kept it equidistant from the Cold War. Prime Minister U Nu and UN Secretary General U Thant were together proponents of the "Third Block." Such a predisposition fitted well with India under Nehru. But with the Ne Win coup of March 1962, India reacted negatively, especially as the Indian community became the first victims. India also expressed indignation at the massacre of students in Rangoon in 1988 and incurred the wrath of the SLORC regime for its support of Aung San Su Khi's struggle. Geopolitically, India's concerns stem from anxieties over its strategic northeast abutting China and Burma, an ethnic mosaic of rebellious tribes. Separately, New Delhi and Rangoon struggle to neutralize these ethnic rebellions, but ethnic crossovers and cross-border collaboration also bedevils both sides. To wit, India condemns Burma's support to insurgent rebels in the Indian northeast, while India has supported rebel Kachins. Certain groups, namely the Muslim Rohingyas, have been the subject of genocidal persecution by the junta generally undermining the triangular Indo-Bangladesh-Burma relationship. But, in the author's view, the Bay of Bengal may also create real competition between the regional powers. It is also the site of major narcotics, gems, and arms trafficking. Narcotics production in Burma not only provides a considerable source of income for insurrections in the re-

gion but forms a special budget for local Burmese military units if not the regime in Rangoon.

But just what is the Chinese presence in Burma? Post-1988, as the regime became shunned by the West, China stepped in with both economic and military aid, eased by the disintegration of the Burmese Communist Party in 1989. In just two years, Burma became China's leading client in the region fitting smoothly into China's economic opening up and linking of Yunnan with the Irrawaddy basin, and beyond, the Indian Ocean, a relationship blessed by visits by Deng Xiao Peng (1988), Hu Jintao (2000) and Jiang Zemin (2002). Drugs and guns are also part of the story, at least across the common border. In 1989 General Than Shwe reciprocated with a visit to Beijing and signing Burma's largest ever arms purchase. Once ingratiated with Rangoon, China has stepped up its military links and, as closely monitored by interested parties including India, has sought to modernize Burma's dilapidated naval facilities if not lay the groundwork for the construction of bases. Excessive Burmese militarization, the author underscores, remains – or should remain – a great cause of concern for neighbors.

Offering some symmetry, the author then addresses India's engagement with Burma commencing with the Rao government under the Look East slogan. This took various institutional forms, including vaguely, a Hindu-Buddhist alliance strengthened by post September 11 events. But while India embraced the victims of the junta's crackdown on the democracy movement, the slide to realism in New Delhi's thinking comprises the final section of the book. By 1993, India fell in with the ASEAN policy of "constructive engagement." National and sector level links have since blossomed with exchanges by leaders and even "nascent" military links. New Indo-Burmese cooperation in unlocking the India North East imbroglio was also at issue. In a separate chapter, the author spells out his thesis that economic links will prove to be the "tool of change" even resurrecting the old dream of India-Burma roads. Finally the author focuses upon competition between India and China in the Bay of Bengal, a new and worrisome maritime dimension of Sino-Indian rivalry. China, obviously, sees in Burma an alternative southern outlet to the sea, west of the South China Sea and the Malacca straits. But like China's touted "blue water navy," this project is far from reaching fruition. The Andaman Islands loom large in this equation, as exposed by the destruction of Indian naval facilities in the tsunami disaster of 2004/05.

But even today, India's charm policy towards Rangoon remains ambiguous and far from clear. The author finds much slippage between Indian "fantasies" over Burma and the hard reality of dealing with the generals. Egreteau concludes that, even while in denial, India has already entered the power struggle in Burma, facing a well-entrenched China and is even ready to sell weapons to the dictatorship. In this new calculus, and the author's bias is obvious, India has no time for Burmese democratic movements.

Recommended for foreign relations and security buffs, the importance of the subject is only bound to grow.

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